OTHER electronic bulletin boards and callers using UUCP-type software to retrieve mail and newsgroups remotely. A 64-line TBBS with PIMP can service up to 63 simultaneous UUCP sessions. In this way, the domain name system of addressing electronic mail can be both connected to the Internet, and also extended to form pyramid-style networks of bulletin boards using domain name e-mail addressing.

The new release also includes a new utility program titled the PIMP Usenet News Tosser or PUNT to sort and toss newsgroup messages to each subdomain serviced by the BBS so that each site only receives messages to the newsgroups of interest. Subdomains can address messages to **AREAS@HOST-SITE.COM** containing the list of newsgroups of interest to update their newsfeed. PUNT also pre-processes newsgroup files received by satellite in the **.BAG** format.

The new PIMP release also includes enhancements to its mailing list server function, simulation of signature files for each caller, a time grid to restrict outdial activity, and a language file structure to allow individual sites to tailor message advisories appearing in e-mail messages to various languages.

PIMP version 3.00 is priced at **$299**. Registered users of the previous **2.xx** versions can upgrade for **$50**. Contact Boardwatch Magazine, 8500 West Bowles Ave., Suite 210, Littleton, CO 80123; **(303)973-6038** voice; **(303)973-3731** fax; **(303)973-4222** BBS. For information send Internet mail to: **PIMPINFO@BOARDWATCH.COM**. To join the PIMP support mailing list, send mail to **PIMPLIST-REQUEST@BOARDWATC.COM** with the word **SUBSCRIBE** in the message body.

SIFTING THROUGH THE USENET WITH THE NETNEWS FILTERING SERVICE

by Kevin Savetz

The Usenet is the world's largest distributed bulletin board system, shared by millions of people using hundreds of thousands of computers scattered along the Internet highway. At last count, there were over 7,000 Usenet "newsgroups," or discussion topics, covering every subject imaginable. Folks on the Usenet talk about everything -everything! - you can think of, from square dancing to motorcycle maintenance... from the Swedish Chef to Ronald Reagan.

With so much going on on the Usenet, it had been impossible to keep abreast of it all. The best you could do was pick out the newsgroups that most interested you, read them as regularly as possible, and try not to let the ever-prolific Usenet keep you away from more important things, like regular meals. The biggest problem was you couldn't search all the newsgroups at once for the information that most interested you. This changed in February with the introduction of the Stanford Netnews Filtering Service, the niftiest Internet hack in... well, in at least a month.

HOW IT WORKS

The Stanford Netnews Filtering Service is a tool for creating personalized delivery of Usenet news. You subscribe to the service by establishing profiles describing your interests. The Filtering Service scans the vast quantity of goodies posted each day to the Usenet and e-mails you articles containing information you are interested in.

The best part is that this automated program searches ALL newsgroups (all those available at **stanford.edu**) for interesting articles. For instance, if you're interested in UFOs, and a conversation about them should pop up in the newsgroup **alt.fan.laurie-anderson** (an altogether unlikely place for such a conversation, admittedly) the filtering service will ensure you won't miss out, even if you don't normally read about Laurie Anderson.

Profiles are simple to set up - just feed the filter plain English text, without boolean ANDs, ORs, or NOTs. For instance, you might search for "object-oriented programming" or "nba golden state warriors basketball." Based on the statistical distributions of the words in articles posted to Usenet, each article is scored to evaluate relevance to your profile. Articles deemed to be interesting to you are e-mailed to you.

The service is rather robust; after you receive useful articles, you can feed the best ones back to the service to improve its search strategy. You can also adjust the frequency of delivery, the volume of articles and the length of your subscription to each profile.

A TRUE STORY

The following story is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the guilty. Once I discovered the Filtering Service, I entered a search for "Negativland" (an alternative music group out of Berkeley.) I try to keep up with Negativland's exploits by reading **rec.music.alternative**, but frankly, nothing else on that newsgroup interests me at all. So I told the filtering service to look for articles about Negativland, set the search time limit for the rest of eternity, and happily waited. The following morning, two articles mentioning Negativland arrived in my e-mail box. With a spring in my step, I unsubscribed from **rec.music.alternative**, content in the knowledge that I would remain informed about Negativland.

So far, so good. For my next trick, I started a news filter on the word **Savetz**, my own last name. Throwing modesty to the wind, I decided that if anyone was talking about me, I ought to know about it.

It seems there's an obscure newsgroup called **air.unix**. Its distribution is limited to a few computers on the second floor of Sweet Hall at Stanford University. It also seems that the Usenet Filter, since it lives at Stanford, can see **air.unix** and filter its articles, even though I, being a non-Stanford person, cannot. And, it seems that indeed, someone there was talking about me.

A woman at Stanford posted a message on **air.unix** asking how to send a fax from the Internet. Another soul, ever-helpful (although misguided about U.S. copyright law), posted to the newsgroup the entire text of an article about Internet faxing that I wrote for the December issue of Boardwatch. He typed the entire 1,400-word article in himself - I can only suppose to impress the woman who asked the question in the first place.

The Usenet Filter dutifully perused the article, found my name therein, and e-mailed it to me. To make a long story short (is it too late?) I told the **air.unix** folks a little about copyright law and gave them even more information about sending faxes from the Internet. I also told them about the Stanford Usenet Filtering Service, and explained that I had found their article because it contained my name. Were they grateful? Apparently not.

The next morning, I discovered that the filtering service was sending me lots of articles that I didn't care about at all. They didn't seem to be about Negativland and they didn't seem to mention me. This threw me for a loop, until I realized that every post from one of those wacky **air.unix** readers concluded with a phrase like "This line is just here so Kevin Savetz has to read this message." Ouch. Final score: Stanford, one. Me, zero.

There are two morals to this story. First, don't tell anyone if you use the filtering service to look for your own name. Second (and more importantly) please use the Internet only for good, not evil.

TO ACCESS THE SERVICE...

You can access the service from Mosaic: **http://woodstock.stanford.edu:2000**

The service also supports e-mail access. To get the instructions on the e-mail interface, send a message with the word "help" in the message body to **netnews@db.stanford.edu**

Here is an example to give you some ideas of how the service works. Say you subscribe to the service with the profile "online information services." Then periodically you will receive e-mail messages like this:

Subscription 1: online information services

Article: misc.activism.progressive.11965
From: hn0003@handsnet.org
Subject: HandsNet WEEKLY DIGEST 1/15-21
Score: 84
First 15 lines:
HANDSNET WEEKLY DIGEST January 15-21, 1994
News from HandsNet's Information Forums HandsNet is a national, nonprofit network connecting organizations working on social and economic justice issues. Members use HandsNet to make new contacts, work collaboratively and to find and publish information, news....

Article: ca.politics.38420
From: rlm@helen.surfcty.com (Robert L. McMillin)
Subject: GOV-ACCESS #5:Cal.Emergency Svcs.online + Net-fax + MINN Pub Info Net
Score: 82
First 15 lines:
Jan. 22, 1994
CALIFORNIA OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES INFO AVAILABLE ONLINE
<a recent exchange of messages>
The state Emergency Digitial Information Service is working fine Telnet to telnet oes1.oes.ca.gov 5501

[Kevin Savetz (savetz@rahul.net) is a computer journalist living in Arcata, California. His first book, Your Internet Consultant: the FAQs of Life Online" will be on bookshelves in June.]

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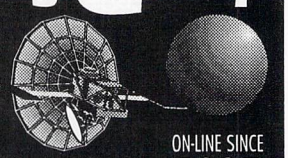
P.O. Box 117088, Carrollton Texas 75011 - 7088



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